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Pulling it Together: an Integrated Model of Language Teacher Conceptual Change

The brief theoretical excursion into the research literature on learning and change has revealed two important things: first, there have been very scarce efforts in the teacher cognition domain to build empirically supported theoretical frameworks of processes involved in teacher change. At the same time, a review of just a small segment of the psychological literature has shown a richness of such activity, revealing a striking overlap with some of the findings generated thus far in the teacher cognition domain. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to paraphrase Albert Einstein (1938), not to pull down an old barn and erect a skyscraper in its place, but rather to pull together the various theoretical threads in an integrated theoretical model which can create new spaces and possibilities for exploring language teacher change.

An important reminder should be made at this point. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research study was theory building rather than theory validating, and the integrated model of Language Teacher Conceptual Change (LTCC) about to be introduced comes from and is fully grounded in the empirical data of this study. A fuller discussion of these findings is presented in Chapters 6–9. Those readers who prefer to get their ‘hands dirty’ and immerse themselves in the data first may find it more satisfying to go straight to Chapter 5 at this point. In contrast, those who appreciate a big picture first before examining the data that generated it will be better off starting with this chapter.

4.1 Introduction to LTCC

The integrated model of Language Teacher Conceptual Change (LTCC; see Figure 4.1) is compatible with at least five domains investigating learning and change: (1) language teacher cognition, (2) the social cognitive
perspective of learning, (3) dual-process theories of attitude change, (4) conceptual change models and (5) possible selves theory. As I have noted in Section 3.2, Gregoire’s (2003) Cognitive–Affective Model of Conceptual Change (CAMCC; see Figure 3.1) is the most comprehensive model of teacher change thus far and a substantial proportion of LTCC indeed draws on its constructs. However, LTCC complements CAMCC in several important ways:

- **The reform message**, that is, the actual content of the reform initiative, is postulated by CAMCC as central to the model. The LTCC model is in agreement with this and posits, in line with attitude change theory, that teachers must systematically scrutinise the content of an educational reform in order for conceptual change to take place. However, by rewording this segment as teacher education input, LTCC embraces the content of a variety of teacher education and teacher development programmes (which includes but is not restricted to educational reforms), as well as a host of other teacher education input variables, including the input source (i.e. teacher educator and his/her attractiveness, credibility and expertise), tasks and peers. As we could see in our earlier review, all these teacher education input variables interact with teachers’ prior cognitions and, depending on the result of this interaction, can either facilitate or distract from the teachers’ systematic engagement with the teacher education message.

- CAMCC’s main proposition concerns the automatic processing of the reform message through the teachers’ attitudes towards it or their prior experience of reform initiatives. Yet, while implied in CAMCC, these teacher cognitions are not included graphically in the model and their exact nature and origin are not specified. The LTCC model remedies this by incorporating the Language Teachers’ Cognitions segment into the model, which, drawing on the findings in the language teacher cognition domain, specifies the type, content and origins of teachers’ cognitions that might interact with the reform input appraisal.

- The self-implication mechanism is a vital and particularly valuable aspect of CAMCC. However, we need a better understanding of what this involves, when such appraisal becomes salient and why it arouses dissonance emotion. The contribution of the LTCC model is in the conceptual explanation of this mechanism by introducing a specific type of teacher cognition, the Possible Language Teacher Self. Drawing on possible selves theory, the construct identifies conditions under which teachers perceive their self as implicated by the teacher education content.